

MEXICAN NOTES AND PERSONALITIES OF THE STRUGGLE FOR TEXAS*

SOME years ago there appeared a humorous little essay, the object of which has to show the relationship between the idiom and temperament of a people; in other words, that people speak as they act. As illustrations the author took the French and Spanish equivalents of our English locution "to take a walk." The French, he said, say "faire une promenade" ("to make a walk"). This is a reflection of the French active and creative nature. As one example of their propensity for "making" things, notice the gestures they make when they talk. On the other hand, the Spanish say "dar un paseo" ("to give a walk"). We know how care-free and generous the Spanish are: they gave away all their priceless possessions in America without asking for even a song in return. Then finally the English say "to take a walk." Nothing, he concluded, could be more characteristic of the English: if anyone wants to give anything away, the English are always ready to take it.

The Mexicans and Americans surely inherited those respective traits from their Spanish and English forebears, judging by the manner in which they dealt with the problem of Texas. José María Tornel, the Mexican Secretary of War during the Texas Revolution, succinctly declared in 1837: "We made a gift of Texas to the North Americans."¹ Perhaps it was inevitable that the Americans should come into possession of Texas, but most Americans feel that the day was hastened by the indiscretion of the Spanish and Mexicans in opening up that territory to foreign colonization.

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There were a few Mexican statesmen, like General Manuel de Mier y Terán, commandant general of the Mexican Eastern Interior Provinces which included Texas, who warned of what he called the imperialistic tendencies of the neighbor to the North saying: "These American advance settlers travel with their political constitution in their pockets, demanding the privileges, authority and officers which such a constitution guarantees."² And Luis de Onís, who negotiated the Florida treaty with the United States in 1819, whereby we renounced all claims to Texas in return for the cession of West Florida, commented: "They consider themselves superior . . . and destined to become the sublime colossus of human power."³

But such foresight was the exception rather than the rule. We do not presume to know what prompted the Spanish to grant a charter to Moses Austin to settle three hundred American families in Texas, but we may make conjectures as to why the Mexicans, after their independence, confirmed this first grant and issued many more during the following ten years. One reason, no doubt, was the inexperience of the Mexicans in the field of international relations. At the time of their independence only eighteen of 754 persons holding the highest political offices were native born.⁴ The other 97½ per cent were replaced by untrained Mexicans who were to cut their diplomatic teeth on this very problem of Texas.

A second reason for Mexican indulgence was the feeling of gratitude for the aid which the United States had given the Mexicans in their struggle for independence, and the prompt official recognition which we accorded them in 1821.

But a third, and perhaps the most forceful reason was the opinion that the prosperity and rapid development of

the United States was due, in large part, to its policy of free immigration. This the Mexicans proceeded to adopt, with disastrous results. From the first Spanish settlements in Texas in the sixteenth century until 1821—a period of three hundred years—the white population of Texas had reached a bare four thousand. Evidence of the greater enterprise of the Americans may be found in the increase of population to thirty-five thousand in 1835, just fourteen years after Stephen F. Austin arrived with the first American settlers.

Our earliest claims to Texas may be said to date from 1803 when we purchased the territory of Louisiana. The French and Spanish had never agreed on a definite boundary between their colonies of Louisiana and Mexico, though the French, more occupied in continental European entanglements, as well as being in violent contact with the British in North America, never seriously challenged the Spanish occupation as far as the Sabine River. Neither did they relinquish their claim to territory west of that point, and thus we acquired this boundary dispute at the same time we acquired Louisiana. When Jefferson authorized Robert Livingston, our minister to France, to offer ten million dollars for Louisiana, it was only for that portion east of the Mississippi River. Time and again Livingston had to remind the French, who wished to sell the entire territory, that we did not wish to extend our boundaries beyond the Mississippi. When, finally, he and James Monroe, who had been appointed special envoy to aid in the purchase, paid fifteen million dollars for the whole of Louisiana, they were so fearful of being reprimanded or even recalled and repudiated, that they felt obliged to write a letter of apology to Secretary of State James Madison.

But the Mexicans embrace the fallacious notion that Jef-

ferson and his predecessors had always had greedy eyes set upon Texas. Señor Tornel, to whom we have already referred, said:

For more than fifty years, that is, from the very period of their political infancy, the prevailing thought in the United States has been the acquisition of the greater part of the territory that formerly belonged to Spain, particularly that part which today belongs to the Mexican nation. Democrats and Federalists, all their political parties, have been in perfect accord upon one point, their desire to extend the limits of the republic to the north, to the south, and to the west, using for the purpose all the means at their command, guided by cunning deceit and bad faith.⁵

Once we had acquired territory west of the Mississippi, Jefferson wanted all that belonged to us, and he thought that might include at least a portion of Texas. This led the Mexicans to charge: "The United States . . . took care . . . to draw up the treaty of sale in such elastic terms as would permit territory that had never belonged to France to be included as part of the purchase."⁶

Despite our vague title to this territory west of the Sabine, President Monroe, in his anxiety to get West Florida, renounced all claims to Texas by the treaty of 1819, as we have already stated. In 1822, the first Mexican minister to the United States proposed that this treaty, which you will remember had been concluded with Spain, be made the basis for settlement of the boundaries between the United States and Mexico. Sensing the opportunity of gaining so easily a new territory rivaling that of Louisiana, we evaded a direct reply. We had recognized the rights of Spain to Texas, but now that Spain had been driven from this continent, why should this territory not as well be ours? Notice our change of opinion in less than twenty years after the whole of Louisiana was, to our distaste, thrust upon us.

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Before 1821 there were probably not one hundred Americans in Texas. The few traders and adventurers who entered in defiance of Spanish decrees were usually shot on the spot or, at best, led off to imprisonment in Mexico. One such intruder was Lieutenant Augustus McGee who, in 1813, led a small army with the avowed purpose of supporting the struggle for Mexican independence. In the ranks of the Spanish army that defeated McGee near San Antonio was a young sub-lieutenant named Antonio López de Santa Anna, making his first visit to the land where, a quarter of a century later, he was to suffer his most humiliating defeat.

In December, 1821, the advance guard of Austin's colony arrived and a few days later the first colony of Americans in Texas was founded on the banks of the Brazos, some fifty or sixty miles from Houston. After the first few land grants to the Americans were confirmed by the Mexican National Congress, authority for further action was transferred to Saltillo, the capital of the combined states of Coahuila and Texas. With land grants under state control, corruption ran rampant. One Mexican historian asserts that the Mexicans were so confused and so ignorant of what they possessed that the same grant was often issued to two or more empresarios, and sometimes land involved lay entirely within the bounds of the United States. Chaos was intensified by land speculators who swarmed into Nacogdoches and set up offices to sell property which they did not even possess.

The Mexican officials actually did not know the extent of their territory: to them Texas meant that portion lying southeast of a line running northward from Laredo to San Antonio then northeastward to Nacogdoches. Even as late as 1848, after the war with the United States, the Mexican government did not realize the immensity of their loss. The

official map of this section then in use was published in London many years before, and was, one may surmise from the following incident, highly inaccurate. In 1854 a Mexican map-maker, Antonio García Cubas, presented what he termed a "true map" to Santa Anna, who looked at it for some time in astonishment. Then, quoting Cubas:

On observing on it the great expanse of the territory which our neighbor so unjustly snatched from us, he uttered I don't remember what words filled with bitterness, at which I could not help being surprised, for I noticed that before the presentation of that map, no one had the least idea of the importance of the territory which had been lost.⁷

As the population of Texas grew, so grew the unrest at the uncompromising policy of the Mexican government in regard to the establishment of local courts, and the questions of slavery, religious tolerance, military garrisons, and immigration. The measures adopted by the Mexicans for dealing with these matters, studied in the light of reason, could not be called oppressive. They pointed up the illogic of burdening the Mexican people with the expense of courts for the colonists who, themselves, paid no taxes whatsoever. As for slavery, the state constitution of 1824 forbade the importation of slaves. It further provided that those already within the territory could be kept, but the Negroes born in Texas should be free. However, the Mexicans did recognize work contracts, even those made in the United States. It was an easy matter for an American to bring in slaves under the pretense of free men, but actually bound by contract executed in the United States to work for him until they repaid their transportation and keep. The masters usually saw to it that the wages were low enough and the expenses great enough to require a lifetime to repay.

On the matter of religious tolerance, the settlers had abso-

lutely no grounds for complaint. The legal grants issued by the Spaniards and Mexicans stipulated that all settlers brought in must be Catholic, for no other religion was allowed. However, this intolerance did not create any undue anxiety among the preponderantly Protestant colonists, who found the greatest inconvenience to be that of having to await the annual visit of the priest to legalize the marriages contracted during the previous year.

It was Commandant General Terán who advocated increased military garrisons, presumably to enforce the neglected customs laws, but in reality to keep an eye on the restive population. It was he, too, who recommended counterbalancing the growing American population with an equal number of Mexicans. But no volunteers could be found, not even in the Mexican prisons, the inmates of which were promised amnesty, free land, and other incentives if they would settle in Texas. Apparently they preferred the security of the prisons to the free enterprise system.

Seeing that a balance could not be affected, General Terán stated: "If the colonization contracts in Texas by North Americans are not suspended, and if the establishments are not watched, it is necessary to say that the province is already delivered to the foreigners."⁸ Accordingly, immigration was forbidden by the decree of April 6, 1830. This decree was the greatest single cause of the Texas Revolution, for it engendered great bitterness in the colonists, nearly all of whom had friends or relatives who wished to join them.

In 1832 came the prelude to the Revolution in the form of uprisings against three or four customs stations and military garrisons, particularly those at Anahuac, Velasco, and

Nacogdoches. These uprisings came at the very moment Santa Anna was overthrowing Bustamante and assuming the presidency for the first of seven times. This was also the same year that General Terán committed suicide or was assassinated, depending on whether you accept the version of Santa Anna who hated him, or of Bustamante whom he loyally served. The Americans took advantage of this change in the Mexican government to protest that their activities were not directed against Mexican authority as such, but merely against Bustamante and in support of Santa Anna.

Santa Anna had his doubts about this declaration of allegiance and sent Colonel José Antonio Mejía to Texas to report on conditions and to quell any outbreaks. Mejía was warmly welcomed as the accredited envoy of Santa Anna with a twenty-one gun salute when he landed at Brazoria in July, 1832. The colonists entertained Mejía lavishly, and, as he was a heavy drinker, many a toast was drunk to his master. At a public dinner and ball given in honor of the eminent visitor, the latter declared:

The cause which you have thus adopted is that of the people against oppression; that of the friends of federal institutions against the military and oppressive government which the ministers of General Bustamante wished to establish. These being the principles which influence this respectable community, I should be inconsistent with my own principles were I not to offer them my friendship and the support of the chief under whose orders I am acting.⁹

The apprehensive colonists were, naturally, quite relieved to hear such words of praise, and they were thankful that the vagaries of Mexican politics had offered them such a convenient alibi. Mejía was so convinced of the loyalty of the Texans that he sailed for Mexico eight days later, setting no restraints upon the population, but rather entrusting them with the task of reducing yet another Mexican garri-

son, the one commanded by the pro-Bustamante Colonel Piedras at Nacogdoches.

Santa Anna's suspicions concerning the Texans were re-kindled, if indeed they had ever been extinguished, by the San Felipe conventions of 1832 and 1833 which petitioned for separate statehood from Coahuila and for the repeal of the restrictions on immigration. Santa Anna therefore sent his brother-in-law, General Cos, with a small force to San Antonio, from which place the latter was expelled late in 1835 by a certain element of the population popularly known as the war party.

Mexican historians have taken a surprisingly lenient attitude towards the earlier American colonists, notably those of Stephen F. Austin, in contrast to the vituperation heaped upon the newcomers, or the war party, whom they blamed for the seething rebellion. One writer said:

The colonists of Texas, on whom political passion imposed so many burdens, remained aloof from the conspiracy of the lawyers and land speculators of Nacogdoches. The empresario Stephen F. Austin was also opposed to the conspiracy until the last. For the war party which was organized in the small population of extreme northern Mexico [that is, Texas] there were no colonists, no federal constitution, no Mexican government. . . . The lawyers and speculators saw a vast and beautiful territory to conquer for the United States, and, impelled by the dominating current of the Nashville School [principally Andrew Jackson and Sam Houston] they prepared war. . . .¹⁰

Santa Anna, writing on the same subject, declared:

Few of the colonists, properly speaking have taken up arms in the struggle. The soldiers of Travis at the Alamo, those of Fannin at Perdido, the riflemen of Dr. Grant, and Houston himself and his troops at San Jacinto, with but few exceptions, were publicly known to have come from New Orleans and other points of the neighboring republic exclusively for the purpose of aiding the Texas rebellion without ever having been members of any of the colonization grants.¹¹

Eugene Barker, one of Texas's most illustrious historians, challenges these statements, declaring:

When all is said, it was really the old settlers who did almost unaided all the effectual fighting in the Texas Revolution. . . . Practically alone they won the battle of San Jacinto.¹²

Such men as Burnet, Borden, Williamson, the Wharton brothers, and Houston the Mexicans classed as outsiders, and it is true that none of them had renounced his American citizenship. In one Mexican history Sam Houston is quoted as having said, after a night of reveling in Washington: "Yes, yes! I am called to enjoy the throne of the Montezumas."¹³ If that throne could still be considered extant, it was at that time occupied by the most controversial figure in all Mexican politics—that cruel, despotic egoist, Santa Anna.

These two claimants to the throne of the Montezumas, Sam Houston and Santa Anna, were to meet upon the world stage for one fleeting moment in a battle which another Texas historian maintains must be reckoned the sixteenth most important battle of the world, since Creasy did not see fit to include it among the fifteen which he treated in his monumental work, *Decisive Battles of the World*.¹⁴

One might suppose that a man who was called seven times, as Santa Anna was (sometimes only by a whisper) to lead his country, mostly in times of the severest crises, would be revered as a patriot. While he was alternately worshiped and execrated by the masses, he was detested then, and is now, by almost all government officials and writers who have left us their opinions. One recent historian calls Santa Anna a "bad general, bad patriot, bad man, and a bad Mexican." This epithet of "bad Mexican" was no doubt conferred upon him because of a wish he had expressed upon his return to Mexico from imprisonment in Texas that "Mexicans might,

forgetting my political mistakes, not deny me the only title I wish to leave my children: that of a 'Good Mexican'."¹⁵

Carlos María de Bustamante, the most notable historian of his day (not related to President Anastasio Bustamante) said:

Santa Anna [departed for the Texas campaign] leaving us quite fearful of the mad acts he would commit on the expedition, but happy both because we no longer had this bungler over us and because of a certain hope that we entertained that by his own hand he was going to incapacitate himself so that he would never again rule over the Mexican people.¹⁶

General Echavárri, the leading general under Emperor Iturbide who misruled Mexico during the first three years of its existence wrote of him:

He lies when he says he is a soldier: he is unworthy of the uniform he wears; he has no friends, for to all he has been ungrateful; he has no followers, because he has never done good to any man; he has no country because it abominates the false one who betrays it to its enemy.¹⁷

Another historian, referring to Santa Anna's liberation by Houston, said that "such a notice could not soothe those who knew him well."¹⁸ Even Santa Anna's private secretary refers to his "evident artfulness and characteristic duplicity."¹⁹ Such opinions seem to justify the remark by Mirabeau Lamar that "his death will be as acceptable in Mexico as in Texas, and can engender no additional hatred and hostility to this country."²⁰

This is the man, however, who had won the support of the army; and despite national disunity and financial exhaustion of the country, he set out from Mexico City in November, 1835, with a force of two thousand men, which later grew to some seven thousand. The northward march from Saltillo began in late January, 1836, during one of the coldest and rainiest periods ever experienced in Texas. Many

of the Maya Indians from tropical Yucatan died on the trip across what the Mexicans termed the "desert," the desolate wastes between Monterrey and San Antonio. There was only one doctor with three hundred pesos worth of medical supplies, and there were no hospital trains. One writer speaks of helping place the dying on the already overloaded munitions wagons.

Sagging morale was soon bolstered by a costly but complete victory at the Alamo, March 6, 1836. Assuming that no Texan would ask, as one of our late presidents is reported to have done upon his visit to this state, what the Alamo is, we shall limit ourselves to a few observations made by the enemy. Santa Anna's first pronouncement on arriving in Texas was as follows: "Our duty has led us to these plains to fight those ungrateful adventurers on whom our unwary authorities lavished favors not accorded to the Mexicans themselves. Wretches! They shall soon see their madness!"²¹

Speaking later of the Alamo in his official report to the Mexican government, Santa Anna wrote: "I wanted to try a generous measure, characteristic of Mexican kindness, and I offered life to the defendants who would surrender their arms and retire."²² Such an offer actually was made, but Travis and his men preferred to die rather than risk becoming almost certain victims of the General's treachery.

Santa Anna reported seventy Mexicans killed and three hundred wounded; Secretary Caro said three hundred were killed on the field and one hundred more died later; Alcalde Ruiz, the chief municipal official of San Antonio, declared that he had the task of burying sixteen hundred Mexican dead. While the General minimized his own losses, he exaggerated those of the Americans, stating: "The corpses of six hundred foreigners were buried in the ditches."²³

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This is a typical example of Santa Anna's fondness for telling two lies when one would do as well. The figure is known to be 181 fighting men, and they were not buried in the ditches, but burned.

Just four days before the slaughter at the Alamo, Texas independence was declared at Washington-on-the-Brazos, and on the very day that the Alamo fell, Sam Houston, the commander-in-chief of the Texas army, escorted by four men, set off towards San Antonio to meet the Mexicans' six thousand. He dared go no farther than Gonzalez, where he found 374 men; then he began his long retreat through Columbia, San Felipe, then northward along the Brazos to about where Hempstead now is, then later to Harrisburg and San Jacinto. During this time a portion of the Mexican army was often only a day or two behind, and at one point it camped only two miles from the Texas army. This northward swing was probably occasioned by the news of Fannin's defeat and massacre near Goliad by General Urrea, who was moving up from Matamoros, mopping up the coastal region.

Santa Anna stayed in San Antonio until near the end of March while a part of his army was yapping at Houston's heels. He thought that all effective resistance had been crushed, and he planned to return to Mexico. Colonel Juan Almonte, later Secretary of War and candidate for the presidency, says that it was only by the greatest insistence that he dissuaded the general from doing so.

As Houston was building up and training his army north of San Felipe, Santa Anna arrived at the latter point with some twenty-seven hundred men, while two thousand others were reasonably close by. Until this time Santa Anna had planned to drive eastward and chase the fleeing American

settlers across the Sabine, as he had already cleared out all the territory west of the Brazos. At this point the Mexican commander learned that the provisional Texas government, including President Burnet, Vice President De Zavala and some of their cabinet, had taken refuge in Harrisburg. Now all previous strategy was thrown to the winds. Santa Anna's every move was animated by one thought: to capture the rebel government leader, execute them, and in one grand stroke end all resistance. No one has suggested that this bait was deliberately set before Santa Anna, but if so, a bigger catch could not have been made.

Selecting some six hundred of his best soldiers, including the cavalry for quick movement, Santa Anna crossed the Brazos at Fort Bend, leaving General Filisola, his second in command, to complete the crossing of the swollen stream, while he, Santa Anna, set out for Harrisburg. The other generals, Cos, Castrillon, Sesma, Filisola, all thought their commander was foolhardy in thus exposing himself with such a small force. Castrillon said: "Nothing avails here against the caprice, arbitrary will and ignorance of that man."²⁴ General Sesma spoke of Santa Anna's ruining "himself and us by his confounded haste and by refusing to listen to his friends."²⁵ Santa Anna himself justified this rash advance ahead of his main body of troops, saying: "A single blow would have been mortal to their cause . . . and such a blow depended on the rapidity of my movements."²⁶

Santa Anna scorned Houston's small, ragged, poorly equipped army which he thought he had left behind, but which about this time was moving down to San Jacinto for the kill. As proof of his contempt, he freed a Negro slave whom he had captured somewhere in the vicinity of Houston and sent him with instructions "to go and tell Houston that

I know where he is and that I am coming up to smoke him out after cleaning out those land thieves in Harrisburg,"²⁷ meaning Burnet, De Zavala, and the other leaders.

Several of Houston's men were deserting because of his reluctance to attack the enemy. The Mexicans say, though, that they were deserting from fear, and that Houston was forced to tell his men falsely that Santa Anna had been obliged to return to Mexico to quell a revolt against his authority. They charge further that President Burnet's distrust of Houston was such that he placed John Rusk in Houston's camp as a spy to see if Houston was not doing more drinking than planning for victory. The report came back that Houston had given up drinking, only to start taking opium. Concerning this latter point, it is interesting to note that when Santa Anna was brought captive before Houston the day after the battle of San Jacinto, it was asserted that he asked for opium to calm his nerves, and that Houston gave it to him.

Colonel Pedro Delgado, one of those captured at San Jacinto gives us some interesting sidelights on the movements of the Mexicans to their doom.²⁸ On April 14 Santa Anna crossed the Brazos with his six hundred men, and on the same day reached Oyster Creek near present Sugarland where, in good humor and with never a thought for Houston, he watched his floundering, cursing troops trying to cross with their stubborn mules, several of which drowned. They continued on through Harrisburg because the Texas leaders had fled, and through New Washington, looting and burning everything the Americans had left behind, until on April 20 a Mexican officer who had been reconnoitering rushed in to report that the Americans were close on the rear, capturing and shooting all the Mexican stragglers.

Whereupon Santa Anna excitedly jumped on his horse, galloped out of the town into the grove where his men were encamped, knocked one man down and rode over another, shouting: "The enemy is coming, the enemy is coming." The alarm of their general so upset the men that it was only with the greatest difficulty, and amid contradictory orders and confusion, that a column of attack was formed. The Mexicans then moved forward in search of the enemy, whom they came upon sheltered in a large wood on the San Jacinto battleground.

In his Manifesto addressed to his fellow citizens, May 10, 1837, Santa Anna stated:

While on the road, Captain Barragán came to inform me that the enemy was approaching Lynchburg. As a matter of fact, being desirous of an engagement, I had the satisfaction of seeing it, of confirming the information I had of its strength and of observing that it had taken a disadvantageous position. . . . I was now in a position to choose the location for battle; and I shut up the enemy in the low marshy angle of the country where its retreat was cut off by Buffalo Bayou and the San Jacinto. . . . I myself occupied the highest part of the terrain.²⁰

Caro asked two questions concerning these statements which Santa Anna never had time to answer in the forty years of life that remained to him: First, why did he think he had entrapped an enemy who had willingly taken up its position for battle? Second, why did he think he occupied the favored position, since the enemy had arrived first and had first choice? Delgado also criticized Santa Anna on this score, saying that any youngster could have picked a better position.

After a light skirmish on the twentieth, both camps lay down to await the momentous day. The twenty-first dawned bright and clear after many weeks of rain, and Houston is

reported by the Mexicans to have made this pompous remark: "The sun of Austerlitz is shining again."³⁰ This and other similar statements have led the Mexicans to charge that Houston considered himself another Napoleon.

Despite the fact that Santa Anna said he had observed the enemy and "confirmed the information he had of its strength," many Mexican officers, certainly as reliable as Santa Anna, have stated that the general thought it impossible for Houston to have advanced so quickly to San Jacinto since the latest reports placed him at Groce's Landing, near present Hempstead, many muddy miles away. Santa Anna suspected that the near-by enemy was a group of volunteers recently arrived from the United States. Furthermore, he could not have observed much of it, for Houston had concealed himself in the wood expressly to prevent the Mexicans from ascertaining that his force had dwindled from about twelve hundred men to seven hundred. Not knowing exactly who these men were, nor how great their number, the Mexican general sent for help. He asked Filisola, who was still crossing the Brazos with some two thousand men, to send him five hundred picked soldiers, without baggage, under General Cos.

Cos arrived shortly before noon on the twenty-first with only four hundred men because, as he had started with baggage, the other hundred were obliged to fall behind to pull the baggage from the mud. Moreover, the four hundred who arrived were, according to Santa Anna, raw recruits who hindered rather than helped when the American attack began. You will take these for what they are—the alibis of a desperate man trying to conceal his own negligence by attributing the defeat at San Jacinto to the stupidity of one man: not himself, but Filisola.

The Americans watched in consternation the arrival of these additional troops, then destroyed the bridge over Vince's Bayou, by which all troops of both sides had had to pass to arrive at that spot. This was done to stop further Mexican reinforcements, though some assert it was for the purpose of preventing the escape of the Mexicans, so confident were the Americans of victory. Santa Anna gave this reason for its destruction: "The bridge had been burned by the enemy to retard our pursuing him."³¹ This nebulous reasoning does not account for the fact that, while it would effectively retard pursuit beyond the bayou by the Mexicans, it would also retard the flight of the Americans across the bayou, bringing certain death.

Siesta time was approaching and Santa Anna and most of his staff, together with the new men who had marched all night, lay down to sleep, first posting a watch under the command of General Castrillon. The latter was killed in the ensuing battle while trying bravely to rally his men, but Santa Anna says that his lack of vigilance was one of the contributing causes of his defeat.

Delgado says that the attack began at about 4:30 P.M., and that all of the horses were unsaddled, some of them grazing, others being ridden bareback to and from water. Most of those men who were not sleeping or riding bareback were out cutting branches for shelter. Some of Houston's men were watching the Mexicans from the tallest trees through a "marine spy glass," so the attack was launched with a fair certainty of success.

Delgado continues his narrative, relating how the surprised Mexicans hid behind trees while his Excellency "was running about in the utmost excitement, wringing his hands, unable to give an order." Santa Anna gave a very different account of his actions:

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I had issued orders for strict vigilance to insure our safety. It was, however, overconfidence that lulled the zeal of those in whom I trusted. . . . Upon awakening, I saw that the enemy had completely surprised our camp. In vain I tried to repair the evil. I exhausted all my efforts to turn the tide.³²

The cavalry finally succeeded in saddling a few horses, and Santa Anna mounted one and sped away. Or, as he himself delicately expressed it: "A servant of my aide-de-camp Colonel Juan Bringas, offered me his horse, and with the tenderest and most urging expressions insisted on my riding off the field."³³ He attempts to hide his cowardice, declaring he only wished to reach Filisola's army which he would lead back to avenge his misfortune. It is doubtful, however, if Santa Anna could have reorganized Filisola's terror-stricken army even if he had reached it, for the few Mexicans who had escaped from San Jacinto had already reported to Filisola that the Texans numbered at least six thousand.

Mexicans refer to San Jacinto not as a "defeat" but as a "surprise." Santa Anna, after enumerating the causes that led to the catastrophe, stated: "It was fate, therefore, and fate alone that clipped the wings of victory that was about to crown our efforts."³⁴ General Filisola, after beginning his retreat towards Mexico, issued the following proclamation: "A cowardly and perfidious enemy has been able by chance to acquire advantages over the section [of the army] commanded personally by the president. . . . They will immensely regret the accidental triumph that they have attained."³⁵

In the long controversy among the Mexicans concerning the blame for the disaster, each of the participants felt obliged to write a book defending his honor and criticizing the others. Santa Anna, obviously the most derelict in his duty, said: "The responsibility of Filisola was obvious, because he and only he caused such a catastrophe by his

criminal disobedience.”³⁶ Urrea also blamed Filisola; Filisola blamed Santa Anna and Urrea; Caro, Delgado, and almost all others accused Santa Anna.

When Santa Anna was captured on the twenty-second, in disguise, he refused to reveal his identity until a movement of curiosity by the other Mexican prisoners betrayed him; then he boldly acknowledged that he was the commander-in-chief, and said: “That man may consider himself born to no common destiny, who has conquered the Napoleon of the West; and now it remains for him to be generous to the vanquished.”³⁷ Houston reminded him that he should have thought of that at the Alamo, and asked what excuse he had to offer for the massacre at Goliad, in view of the fact that Fannin had surrendered on the condition that the men be spared and sent back to the United States. To this Santa Anna replied:

I declare to you, General, I did not know they had surrendered. General Urrea informed me he had conquered them: hence I ordered their execution. If the day ever comes when I get my hands on Urrea, I will execute him for his falsehood.³⁸

The President’s secretary states that three trunkfuls of orders and correspondence were left behind with Filisola, and that if these had been captured, Houston would have had proof, written by Caro and signed by Santa Anna, that the latter knew all the facts and had arbitrarily ordered the executions. Caro concluded that it was fortunate for both himself and Santa Anna that the trunks were taken to Mexico.

After an interval Colonel Almonte, who spoke English well, took up the conversation and asked Houston why he had not attacked in force on the twentieth before the Mexican reinforcements arrived. Houston replied, drawing a

partly eaten ear of dry corn from his pocket, "You talk about reinforcements, Sir, it matters not how many reinforcements you have, you never can conquer free men as long as their General can march four days with one ear of corn for his rations."³⁹ Santa Anna, who understood no English, asked what was being discussed. Years later he said "that this was the first moment he had ever understood the American character; and that what he had witnessed convinced him that Americans never could be conquered."⁴⁰

The Mexican leader turned out to be a valuable prisoner. He was easily induced to bring about the withdrawal across the Rio Grande of the remaining Mexican armies, still a formidable force of more than four thousand men. In addition, he signed two treaties ending hostilities and acknowledging Texas independence. The withdrawal of Mexican troops was ordered on the first day of Santa Anna's captivity. Then in a letter to Filisola three days later, he wrote:

I recommend that you comply with my official orders respecting the retreat of the troops as early as possible. It is necessary for the security of the prisoners and particularly for that of your affectionate friend and comrade, Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna.⁴¹

It is interesting here to recall his bolder words a year later when he was defending himself from his critics in Mexico: "I would have suffered a thousand deaths rather than reflect on the honor of Mexico."⁴²

Finally, on June 1, 1836, the prisoner was permitted to embark on a ship bound for Mexico, and during the two days before the ship was to sail, he issued the following fond farewell to his late enemies:

My friends: I have been a witness to your courage on the field of battle and know you to be generous. Rely always on my friendship and you shall never regret the considerations you have shown me. In returning, through your kindness,

to the land of my birth, I beg you to accept this sincere farewell from your grateful friend.

Farewell.⁴³

Santa Anna was forcibly taken from the vessel by some two hundred volunteers who had just arrived from New Orleans (the Mexicans called them "wait-and-see patriots") and again imprisoned, this time in Columbia. As a result of a plot to escape with the aid of the Mexican consul in New Orleans, a ball and chain were put on his foot. Houston argued that Santa Anna should be returned to Mexico, for, in Houston's words, he would keep the country in such turmoil that Texas would never again be menaced. That is exactly what happened.

After Houston was elected president of Texas in September, 1836, he sent Santa Anna to Washington to confer with President Jackson. William H. Wharton, the first minister of Texas to the United States, was already in Washington negotiating for the recognition of Texas independence. He reported that Santa Anna said to him: "The treasury of the United States is well filled; I hope you, as Minister from Texas, will not obstruct my government from obtaining a few millions from this government for a quit claim to Texas."⁴⁴

From Washington Santa Anna returned directly to Mexico in February, 1837. As he was a leading personality in the struggle for Texas, perhaps a few words may be said about what fate was reserved for our villain.

After almost two years of seclusion, he regained his prestige in the so-called "Pastry War" with the French in December, 1838. The French made a landing at Vera Cruz after the Mexicans had refused to pay indemnities for damages suffered by a French baker in a Mexican riot. After a few skirmishes the French were rather leisurely re-embark-

ing when Santa Anna galloped up and was shot in the leg by a cannon. As a result the leg was amputated and Santa Anna never failed to recall how he had bravely shed his blood for his country, and how, in his words, he had chased the French into the sea.

This leg occasioned one of the most ludicrous events in all history. At the height of Santa Anna's power in 1842 some of his flatterers, or more probably jokesters, decided that the leg should be given a hero's burial. Accordingly, the funeral procession, accompanied by Santa Anna himself, entered the capital and made its way to the shrine where the leg was interred amidst laudatory orations and general mourning. It is not stated whether or not a Requiem Mass was said for the departed sole.

Also in 1839, Santa Anna put down a rebellion led by General José Antonio Mejía, the former Colonel Mejía who had received such an ovation at Brazoria in 1832. He ordered Mejía shot within three hours. Mejía, it is reported, said that if he had been victor and Santa Anna the vanquished, he would have shot the latter in three minutes.

Santa Anna was elected president in 1841, again in 1845, and in 1846. In 1846 and 1847 came the war with the United States, and Santa Anna, now called the Immortal Three-Quarters as a result of the missing leg, appointed himself commander of the Mexican armies with the usual results. Then came exile until Santa Anna succeeded in regaining the presidency for the last time in 1853. In 1856 he was again exiled, this time for eighteen years.

In 1866, while in exile in Jamaica, he was visited by our Secretary of State Seward, who was searching for a successor to Maximilian whom we wished to oust in accordance with the Monroe Doctrine, now that the Civil War had

ended. A group of swindlers, learning of this visit, sent Santa Anna a letter to which they forged Seward's name, informing him that he had been chosen to lead the expedition for which we had appropriated fifty million dollars, of which thirty million was to be at the personal disposition of Santa Anna. A ship was sent to get Santa Anna, and he was immediately informed that the money, though appropriated, was not yet available, and that it would be necessary for him to advance a large sum of money to retain the ship. He obliged with a down payment of seventy thousand dollars. Then he was taken to New York, where he was kept paying fake bills for imaginary supplies until he had spent several hundred thousand dollars. Some have estimated that the amount may have exceeded a million.

After the inevitable exposé, Santa Anna returned to Jamaica, from which he was recalled in 1874 to spend the last two years of his life in his native land. In 1876 he died penniless and almost forgotten, but hopeful to the end that he might once more rally a new generation of Mexicans behind him.

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NOTES

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